

A LOOK BACK AT NAVAL HOSPITAL HARRIMAN, THE NAVY'S FIRST CONVALESCENT HOSPITAL

By André B. Sobocinski, Historian, BUMED

On November 16, 1942, the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED) commissioned Naval Hospital Harriman. Formerly known as Arden House, the facility had been the ancestral home of the U.S. ambassador to Russia, and later governor of New York, W. Averell Harriman. In August 1942, Harriman offered his home to the U.S. Navy for use as a hospital.

Located in the Ramapo Mountains in southeastern New York, the Harriman estate was once described as being “Perched majestically on the summit . . . like a mighty bird watching over her young. . . [she] proudly surveys the rolling wooden vales, hills, plateaus, grassy-green meadows and mountain lakes for many miles around.”

Harriman was the first of the Navy's “convalescent hospitals,” a new type of treatment facility that offered its “guests” rest, relaxation and an atmosphere conducive to physical and psychological rehabilitation.



Aerial view of Naval Hospital Harriman, the first of the U.S. Navy's 14 convalescent hospitals. *All photos from BUMED Archives*

Although at 80 beds the smallest of the Navy's convalescent facilities, Harriman offered plenty of recreation. Amenities included books, boating, fishing, a game room, baseball, basketball, swimming, ice skating and plenty of fresh air. As an article published in *The Hospital Corps Quarterly* put it, "Nature, the elements and man have all united to create this quiet haven for convalescent patients; many have returned to active duty with restored health and pleasant recollections of the new war-type [sic] hospital."

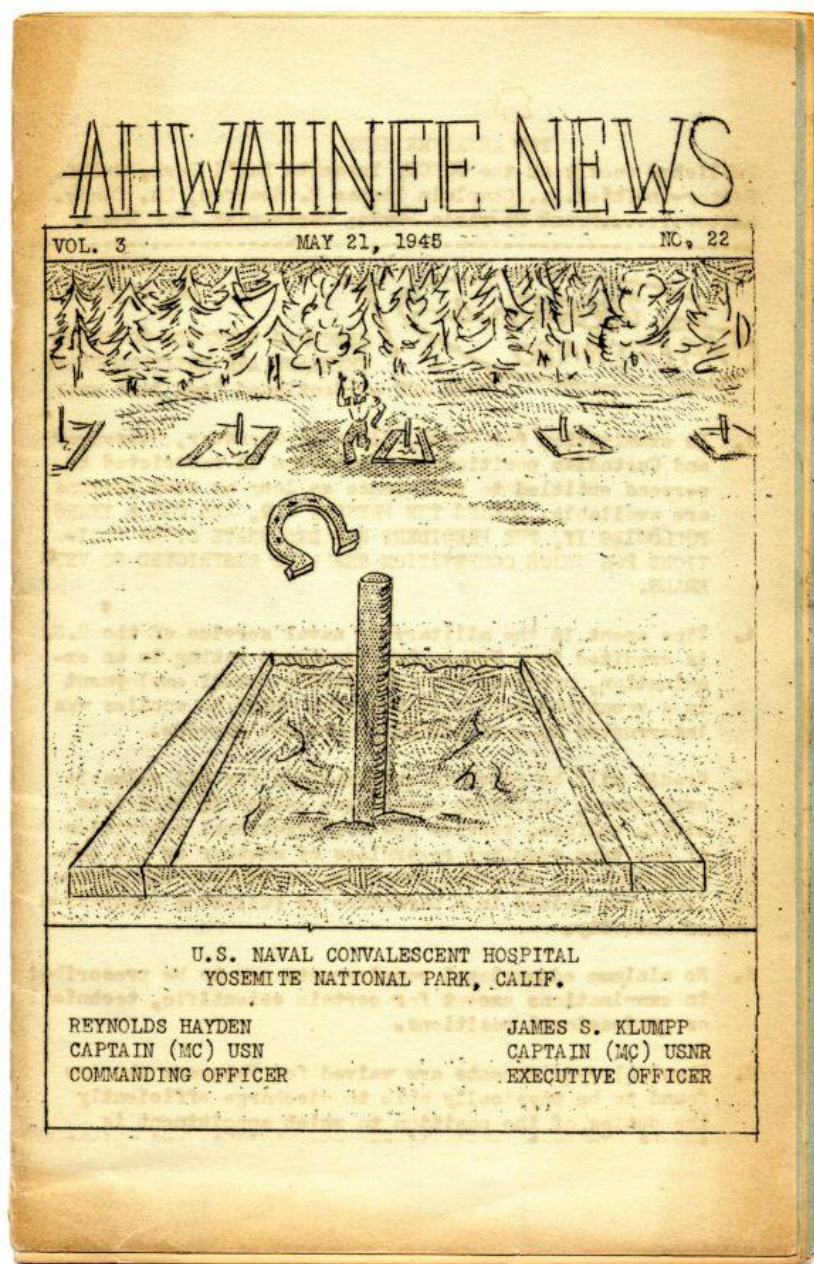
Harriman was far from alone in its mission. By war's end, the Navy operated 14 convalescent hospitals many located at some of the most majestic luxury resorts and hotels at the time. Among them:

Naval Hospital Santa Cruz, Calif. Established in the spacious Hotel Casa Del Rey, Santa Cruz offered its guests such activities like golf, horseback riding, bowling alleys, a "warm salt water plunge," deep-sea fishing, trips to the countryside, two basketball courts, an 18-hole miniature golf course, horseshoe pitching, handball courts, a softball diamond, croquet courts, a complete gymnasium and a motion picture theater.

Between March 8, 1943 and December 1, 1945, 18,263 patients were admitted to Santa Cruz; of these, 9,941 were returned to duty or transferred to other hospitals and 8,322 were discharged from the service.

Naval Hospital Glenwood Springs, Colo. Located at a legendary resort and hydrotherapeutic facility, Glenwood Springs offered its guests access to its three hot water springs, bath houses, caverns and a year-round indoor luxury swimming pool.

Naval Hospital Yosemite, Calif. Based at the luxurious Ahwahnee Hotel, the naval hospital complex was spread across 37 acres in Yosemite National Park and situated on the north bank of the Merced River opposite Glacier Point near the massive El Capitan.



Cover of Naval Convalescent Hospital Yosemite's newsletter, *The Ahwahnee News*, May 1945

In June 1945, as the need for hospitalization increased, naval convalescent hospitals expanded their scope. These facilities—now called “Special Hospitals”—continued to receive those needing “convalescence” but also began taking care of those requiring acute care. With war’s end and shifting needs, the Navy’s convalescent facilities were gradually disestablished.

On November 1, 1945, the Naval Special Hospital Harriman was decommissioned. On April 15, 1946, Naval Special Hospital Arrowhead Springs, Calif., decommissioned marking the end of the Navy’s short chapter on convalescent hospitals.

Sources:

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